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Viewing cable 06BOGOTA2291, AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PEACE COMMISSIONER RESTREPO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BOGOTA2291	2006-03-14 15:02	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

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VZCZCXYZ0029
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #2291/01 0731502
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141502Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3118
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6651
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 7373
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR LIMA 3401
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 8901
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4046
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3493
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHOND/DIR ONDCP WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002291

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2015

TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PEACE COMMISSIONER RESTREPO

REF: A. BOGOTA 1965 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). BOGOTA 1987

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#). (C) On March 8, Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo shared his views on the ELN, the paramilitary demobilization process, and the country's security situation with the Ambassador over dinner at the residence. Restrepo said the recent round of talks with the ELN in Havana had been difficult, but productive. The GOC may be prepared to allow the opening of more Casas de Paz around the country if the ELN agrees to a cessation of hostilities. Restrepo said the OAS report on re-emerging paramilitary activity had given the OAS Mission greater legitimacy but the groups mentioned in the report are little more than criminal organizations, not new paramilitary entities. He acknowledged that reintegrating thousands of demobilized illegal combatants would be difficult and agreed that a national "czar" to coordinate these efforts was still necessary. Restrepo predicted the conflict with the FARC will likely move to rural counties, and the GOC is working on a strategy to secure those areas. During dinner, Restrepo was interrupted constantly by phone calls from senior Colombian officials, including President Uribe, regarding questions over the demobilization of a FARC company the day before. End Summary.

ELN Negotiations Difficult, but Productive

[2](#). (C) Restrepo said the recent round of talks with the ELN in Havana had been difficult (see ref A). At one point, the ELN negotiators sought to have him removed from the negotiations and threatened him in front of the Spanish and Cuban representatives. Restrepo said members of Colombian civil society had advised the ELN against talking to him, calling him an "extremist." Restrepo said the ELN is committed to the negotiations, but this did not necessarily mean they were prepared to conclude an agreement. Restrepo underscored that the ELN wants near-term, tangible benefits from its negotiations, such as the lifting of Interpol red notices to allow them travel to Europe, and the release of a former ELN commander from Valle de Cauca, now incarcerated and charged with a mass kidnapping in Cali. Restrepo reiterated the GOC's preference that negotiations continue in Cuba, where the GOC can maintain better control, rather than Europe, as the ELN has advocated.

[3](#). (C) Restrepo assessed the negotiations have reached a point where neither side can leave the table without suffering political costs. The ELN expects President Uribe to win the May election and has decided to work within this &political reality,⁸ which he thought would contribute to further progress in the April round of talks. Restrepo added that the FARC opposes the ELN's decision to negotiate with the GOC, placing the ELN in a more vulnerable security situation, improving the prospects that the ELN will stick with the process.

Future of ELN Guarantors

[4](#). (C) Restrepo said the civil society guarantors of the GOC-ELN talks are struggling for continued relevance. In his view, their presence is less necessary now that negotiations

have begun. Some civil society groups, such as human rights NGO MINHA, have asked for Casas de Paz in other parts of the country, but the GOC is hesitant to support that idea because it would be unable to provide security for them at this time.

The GOC has proposed, however, that if the ELN halts all hostilities, it will allow other Casas de Paz to be opened, a proposal that has received support from some organizations, such as the labor federation CUT.

Rumors of Paramilitary Resurgence

15. (C) Restrepo said the March 1 OAS report noting a re-emergence of paramilitary activity in some parts of the country gave the OAS Mission greater legitimacy, but put the GOC in a difficult political situation (Ref B). He has received similar reports of illicit activity*sometimes from former paramilitary leaders themselves*but has been unable to find evidence to support the claims. Restrepo acknowledged that the GOC should take responsibility for any new emergence of paramilitaries, but insisted it was limited in what it could do about localized paramilitary groups, since those groups had not been at the negotiating table. He said these groups are essentially localized mafias, lacking in the discourse, ideology, and national unity that the paramilitaries once espoused.

16. (C) Restrepo said the demob reinsertion process was at its lowest point in terms of credibility, and the OAS report reinforced that perception. He agreed that a "czar" for re-integration efforts was still necessary. At the moment, each government entity involved was moving at its own pace out of sync. Restrepo said Jorge 40,s planned demobilization on March 10 would mark an important step in the demobilization process, but a long road still lay ahead in terms of justice and reparations.

Mounting Concern for Rural Communities

16. (C) Restrepo predicted the conflict with the FARC would likely move to the corregimientos (rural county equivalent), and said the GOC was already developing a plan to improve security. Many of these communities, because of their location in mobility corridors and links to the illicit economy, are vulnerable to FARC incursions. If the FARC successfully starts taking over these areas, Restrepo said the dynamic of the conflict would change. As an example, he cited a community located in a mobility corridor between San Luis and Puerto Triunfo, Antioquia where a small group of guerrillas recently arrived and advised the population they were again in charge. While the guerrillas did not take military action against the community, they intimidated the locals, including demobilized paramilitaries still in that area. He worried that the military does not know the local geography and is not focused on the strategic importance of these small populations. Restrepo said these towns need greater attention from the military and intelligence entities, as well as more social programs. Restrepo,s office plans to write up a paper on the threat to the corregimientos and what can be done to correct it. He agreed to provide the Embassy with a copy.

FARC Demobilization Drama

17. (C) The meeting was interrupted a few times by phone calls from Colombian officials, including an unhappy President Uribe, regarding the demobilization of a FARC company the day before (septel). Although press reports initially claimed the company had handed over an airplane during the demobilization, subsequent reporting revealed the plane had been in Colombian custody for two years. Restrepo said Uribe was concerned that the handling of this issue had damaged GOC credibility. As an aside, Restrepo said the FARC had lost

ground with the international community and that the International Commission, which had put forward the latest proposal on a humanitarian exchange in December 12, had little more to offer to the process.

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